What to say when the barista asks how you’d like your coffee: I’ll Take theSkimm:

*What Motivates Millennials to Seek News Sources and Engage in Political Discussion*

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**Introduction**

Imagine chatting with friends at happy hour when they suddenly switch topics to something unfamiliar - a news source called *theSkimm*. They briefly touch on its main features which includes mini blurbs on current events with a touch of light-hearted humor. Will you decide to check it out for yourself?

Individuals seek the news for a variety of reasons. Some like to feel informed about the world around them, while others simply want to feel included and participate in political discussions about current events. Why does Stephen Colbert’s satirical banter trump turning the pages of *The New York Times* for Millennials? In the following sections we will be discussing motivations for seeking the news, how political humor is of use, and what the millennial generation ultimately learns from the news. After this discussion, we will present a study in which we hope to uncover and understand the relationships between these needs, and what motivates millennials to consume political entertainment sources, retain knowledge, and engage in relevant discussion.

**Motivations for Seeking the News**

Individuals have a variety of motivations for seeking the news. Before we begin our discussion of these motivations, it is important to define what we mean by “seek the news.” For the purposes of our literature review, “seek the news” will refer to efforts to collect current information through any platform including but not limited to cable television, newspaper, and online sources.

**Need for Cognition/Surveillance Motivation**

The most thoroughly discussed motivation for seeking the news is called Need for Cognition (NC). Functionally, NC “measures an individual’s attitude towards stimuli or tasks requiring reasoning or problem solving…” (Holmes, 2004, p. 5) and represents an inclination to gather and organize knowledge. According to Cacioppo et al. (1996; cited in Holmes, 2004 p 5), individuals with a high Need for Cognition (HNC) “...are more likely to seek out and scrutinize information when making decisions, perceive social issues to be more personally relevant…” while those Low in Need for Cognition (LNC) were more likely to turn to others for information or rely on cognitive heuristics in order to make sense of the world. Holmes (2004) sites Cacioppo et al. (1996) who additionally characterized HNC individuals in that they “...naturally tend to seek, acquire, think about, and reflect back on information to make sense of stimuli, relationships, and events in their world” (p. 5).

Other researchers have interpreted the need to make sense of the world and coined it surveillance motivations. Surveillance motivations, according to Shoemaker (1996, cited in Eveland, 2003, p. 363), “...are represented in the information transmission function of the news; that is, they represent a desire to learn from the news as part of a more basic need to monitor the environment.” Eveland observed that individuals glean surveillance gratification from gathering information about one’s environment (Eveland, 2001). In addition to surveillance motivation, other communication scholars have labeled similar concepts “reflective integration” (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990), “active reflection” (Eveland, McLeod, & Horowitz, 1998), or the “amount of invested mental effort” (Salomon, 1981). Need for cognition and surveillance motivations will be used interchangeably throughout the paper as both refer to individual’s desire to gather information in order to understand the world around them.

The cognitive mediation model (CMM; Eveland, 1998, p. 200) can be applied to predict the effect of Need for Cognition on knowledge of news. Eveland utilized the theory to explain behaviors of those with HNC; “The cognitive mediation model predicts that a surveillance motive will lead to a number of information processing behaviors, including attention to and elaboration on news content” (Eveland, 2003). In other words, when one seeks the news to help them understand and learn about the world, this process leads to one connecting the new content with old content. By doing so, one can more easily recall and become engaged with news. Eveland’s study sought to explain the connection of NC and levels of knowledge; therefore, he recorded the process that often takes place once an individual encounters news. Elaboration can be described as “...the process of connecting new information to other information stored in memory, including prior knowledge, personal experiences, or the connection of two new bits of information together in new ways” (Eveland, 2001, p. 573).

The cognitive mediation model implies that people with high NC would seek out and remember the news more effectively than those low in NC. Eveland (2001 p 577) clarified that “It is important to note that the function of motivation in the cognitive mediation model is not to increase knowledge directly but to engage those cognitive processes that do not directly influence knowledge levels,” thus stating that elaboration rather than NC is what produces an increase in knowledge. Eveland’s (2001) research provided considerable support to the hypothesis that surveillance gratifications seeking is positively related to knowledge of the content covered in the news, providing additional evidence that the cognitive mediation model is helpful in the realm of research on learning from the news. The cognitive mediation model allows us to view media effects a sequential process by which motivations (ie. NC) lead to information processing that in turn could bring about learning.

The findings of Cacioppo et al. (1996) and Eveland (2001) lead us to Hypothesis 1:

***H1:*** *We predict there will be a positive relationship between a need for cognition and political interest.*

**Need to Evaluate**

According to Bizer et al. (2004 p. 996), Need to Evaluate (NE) is “a personality trait that reflects a person’s proclivity to create and hold attitudes; people high in NE are especially likely to form attitudes toward all sorts of objects.” Bizer et al. (2004 p. 1018) observed that “...as need to evaluate predicts who is likely to hold attitudes, the likely results of holding those attitudes—attitude-relevant cognitions, behaviors, and affective responses—were more likely among [high] NE respondents.” In addition to identifying NC as a motivation, Holmes (2004, p. 1) predicted that “individuals high in ... Need to Evaluate will exhibit higher levels of political knowledge than those who are low in motivation...”; NE is associated with making judgements about not just objects but events as well. Thus, one who reads the news and is high in NE will be more likely to be knowledgeable about and take a strong stance on an issue, event, or candidate.

Holmes’s (2004) research concluded that NE has a significant positive relationship with the use of certain media platforms such as talk radio but a significantly negative relationship with cable. He further noted that “NE does not predict seeking political information on the internet” (Holmes, 2004 p. 16) and that NE’s interactions with internet use must be removed for NE to become “a strong overall predictor of political knowledge” (Holmes, 2004, p. 21). Holmes’s claim is open to question, however, because he never stipulated what “internet” is. We do not know if a source such as *theSkimm* would be classified as part of the “internet.” In addition, Holmes’s research is more than a decade old, and given the massive changes in the functions performed by the internet over that timeframe, his conclusions may no longer be valid. Given Holmes’s ambiguous findings on the topic of need for evaluation, we postulate our first research question:

***RQ1****: What is the relationship between need for evaluation and political interest?*

**Need for Affiliation**

David (2009) quoted Payne, Severn, & Dozier (1998), saying, people may consume news and pay attention in anticipation of social interactions in order to secure information that can be useful in conversation. Analogously, Ruggerio (2000) provided another motivation for seeking the news: interpersonal utility. Interpersonal utility refers to the idea that an individual will collect information to use in conversation with others. Ruggerio’s (2000) discussion speaks to the concept of need for affiliation. Knowledge from the news can be seen as a way to connect with others and, if trying to appear aware, can aid one in presenting themselves as in-the-know. This exemplifies the social utility that knowledge from news provides motivation to seek out such knowledge. Ruggerio (2000) added another motivator for seeking the news that is closely related to need of affiliation: personal identity, with the function of reinforcing one’s attitudes, beliefs, and values. A byproduct of educated discussion of political knowledge with friends is the feeling of validation of their personal identity. When one acts on their need for affiliation, one’s personal identity is additionally strengthened. He or she feels confident in their choice of news source and their knowledge of the world around them. Based on these proposals, we establish Hypothesis 2:

***H2****: We predict there will be a positive relationship between a need for affiliation and political discussion.*

**Political Interest**

Holmes (2004) and David (2009) also brought up political interest as a motivator for an individual to seek the news. It is worth mentioning, however, that Holmes (2004) clarified that political interest cannot stand on its own as a motivator. That is, one should exhibit HNC and/or HNE in order to reflect high levels of knowledge once reading/watching/listening to the news. Holmes (2004) details political interest’s importance related to NC and NE; “..even in cases where NC and NE are significant predictors of media use the coefficient for interest is much stronger than those for NE or NC, indicating that it has a more powerful impact” (p. 15). We will consider political interest as an important motivation with NE and NC, as the majority of *theSkimm’s* content is political in nature. Based upon Holmes (2004) and David’s (2009) recognition of political interest leads us to our third hypothesis:

***H3a****: We predict there to be a positive relationship between political interest and news consumption.*

**Conclusion for Motivations**

Papacharissi & Rubin’s (2000) factor analysis of motives for Internet use yielded five interpretable factors: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. Two of these factors, interpersonal utility and information seeking, are key to our discussion of motivations for seeking the news; a third (entertainment in the context of political humor) will be discussed in further detail later. Need for evaluation may act as a key judge for news-relevant attitudes, while political interest is an additional reason for seeking information. One must remember that motivations are, as Rubin (1983) said “...not isolated static traits, but rather, comprise a set of interactive needs and expectations” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 39). The needs for cognition, evaluation, and affiliation, and political interest are all essential in our discussion of why and how individuals learn from the news.

**News Consumption & Millennials**

Millennials, the generational term used to describe those between the ages of 18 and 33, comprise roughly 50 million people in the United States. The name comes from those born in or after 1982, the first generation to come of age in a new millennium. They are the only generation that has not had to adapt to new technologies, a term known as “digital natives” (Pew Research Center, 2014). While their first introduction to computers may have been while playing “The Oregon Trail” on their desktop computers in elementary school, by college they were expected to bring their personal laptop, tablet, and/or smart phone to their lectures. Technology has become ubiquitous with education.

This generation has become an important group to study for a number of reasons. Millennials are on course to become the most educated generation in society and have the debt to prove it. The average student loan debt was $15,000 just two decades ago, while today it stands at $27,000 (Pew Research Center, 2014). Social Security is another issue that will affect Millennials more than any other generational group. Along with being questioned about their ability to handle these issues, Millennials have also faced a large amount of scrutiny from older generations, blaming them for having little interest in politics and being too socially concerned. One might argue that this has more to do with the older generation’s uncertainty around the large influx of new technology. Yet the truth remains that voter turnout among the youth is much lower than any other age group, comprising only about 19% of the American vote (Kotkin, 2012). With current low voter turnout, there is opportunity for political leaders to capture that vote. Some sources say that Millennials were key to President Barack Obama’s victory over Mitt Romney in the 2012 election. Behind Hispanics, Millennials were seen as the most important group with 60% voting for Obama, according to CNN exit polls. (Kotkin, 2012).

Ongoing research of Millennials shows that they differ from their elders in a wide variety of areas. They are the most racially diverse generation in America (Pew Research Center, 2014). They also represent a mix of political backgrounds. Half of Millennials identify as independents and 30% do not associate themselves with any religion. Millennials have low levels of social trust, with only 19% believing that most people can be trusted, compared to 31% of Gen X, 40% of Baby Boomers and 37% of the Silent Generation. Only 31% believe there is a large difference between Republican and Democratic parties. Millennials are the only generation in which there are fewer conservatives than liberals. And with 81% of them on Facebook, they make up the largest group on social media. These differences make scholars interested in what America will look like in 20 years. “Over the next decade, the millennial generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged – with potentially seismic consequences for America” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4). Specifically, scholars wonder how these shifting values and beliefs will affect news consumption. In a study conducted by Poindexter (2012) comparing teens of all three generations, Millennial teen’s use of media stood out. She predicted that future news consumption of this generation would be completely different.

News has become integrated in the digital age. The shift from newspapers to online content has led to many changes in the news industry. Only 27% of Millennials enjoy staying up-to-date on the news and only 23% read a newspaper regularly (Pew Research Center, 2010a). “If the trend of the declining newspaper continues at the current pace, by 2030, less than 10% of adults, not just Millennials, will be regular newspaper readers” (Poindexter, 2008, p. 7). Tom Rosensteil, the Director for the Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism, refers to Millennials and their news consumption habits as “news grazers” – “they look for what they want, when they want it, and they graze across lots of different sources, although a limited number of sources” (Pew Research Center, 2010b). Results from a study conducted by Tewksbury (2003) about the behavior of news readers on the internet supported the same conclusion specifically with online readers, suggesting they are especially likely to seek content aligning with their personal interests. But people are not simply getting their news online - they are using multiple platforms on multiple devices. A large majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to seek news on an average day, including national TV, local TV, internet, local newspapers, radio, and national newspapers. “Six in ten Americans (59%) get news from a combination of online *and* offline sources on a typical day, and the internet is now the third most popular news platform, behind local television news and national television news” (Pew Research Center, 2010a, p. 2). Rosensteil added that “Now that they have a delivery system that meets their behavior, their needs, their personality; they’re avid consumers” (Pew Research Center, 2010b). This multi-platform environment is changing the landscape of how we consume news.

In a study conducted about source credibility, results supported the idea that news is becoming a social activity. 44.2% of college students subscribe to news updates on Facebook or Twitter and 65.4% said they share information with friends and family on these social networking sites (Phinney, 2012). According to the Pew Research Center (2010a), more than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in emails. Sharing online is another form of communication that can lead to discussion.

***H4****: We predict there to be a positive relationship between news consumption and political discussion.*

***RQ2A:*** *What is the relationship between news consumption and the retention of knowledge?*

In its Social Media Update 2014, the Pew Research Center found that multi-platform use is increasing: 52% of online adults currently use two or more social media sites, a significant increase from 2013. But still, there is a generational gap when it comes to seeking news. For one, there is a large difference between Baby Boomers and Millennials when it comes to the benefits of news engagement, making Millennials significantly more likely to receive an enjoyment benefit from engaging with news (Poindexter, 2012). Poindexter found that a lack of news coverage of the Millennial generation plays a role in whether Millennials engage with the news.

**Political Humor**

Often times many college-aged, young people choose political comedy shows over traditional news outlets. This population specifically is more likely to seek information from political entertainment shows, such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* or *The Colbert Report*, as opposed to national news outlets (Young, 2012). The college climate often isolates students from the mainstream news sources - like newspapers or television networks - because of the on-the-go nature of many campuses. Perhaps engaging in political humor or late-night shows fits more into their social schedules and need for relaxation.

The majority of research in this category has focused on viewers of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, The Colbert Report,* and late-night shows like *Saturday Night Live.* Although these shows are primarily seen as just that - entertainment - there is evidence that young adults seek information as well. In one study, it was found that 41% of participants who preferred *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report,* as opposed to traditional news outlets, reported watching the shows as a source of information and knowledge. Humor and entertainment were also cited as reasons for preferring these shows (Young, 2012). “...[T]he hybridity of political satire's form and function is illustrated by the fact that viewers who see the show predominantly as entertainment also cite it as a source of information—suggesting that viewers perceive this genre as satisfying multiple needs or gratifications simultaneously” (Young, 2012, p. 165). “In this way, political comedy is believed to operate more as a news enhancer than a news supplement, especially for less engaged viewers who are most likely to come to political comedy without a particularly extensive existing stock of political knowledge” (Xenos & Becker, 2009, p. 320). Many young people also report that they watch the news because it is useful in social settings, thus recalling Need for Affiliation as a motivator. They desire to be informed participants in the conversation around current events and feel that their knowledge might lead them to impress others (Feldman & Young, 2008). By using entertaining programs as sources of information, the viewer is more likely to satisfy their desire to engage in political conversation socially.

Though viewers see political humor as serving two purposes, many argue that adding humor to world issues distracts from the seriousness of the matters. For example, political figures like President Barack Obama insert jokes into speeches on certain occasions; furthermore, some have argued that this is a mechanism to deflect listeners’ attention away from serious issues. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) also challenges the use of humor in political climate, but only in terms of relation to content. “When the humor is unrelated to message content, individuals will elaborate on the humor, not on the message” (Matthes, 2013, p. 293).

While there are critics of using humor as a vehicle for messages, there are many - if not more - arguments in support of political comedy as a news source. Although viewers might not initially be politically knowledgeable, there is some research that viewing political entertainment shows over time may enhance their knowledge and awareness. For example, those who regularly viewed news entertainment programs paid more attention to campaign details on national news networks than non-viewers (Feldman & Young, 2008). It is unclear whether or not those who viewed political comedy shows went into viewing with background knowledge, but there is research on such programs enhancing the viewers’ overall learning experience. “About 9% of respondents preferring… [*The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*] ...did so because of its ability to contextualize and provide details/background to their understanding of political issues and events and to aid in political comprehension and understanding” (Young, 2012 p. 162 ). These viewing patterns and knowledge levels might also have something to do with the population. It was found that young people with higher levels of education had the strongest positive correlation with political comedy shows and level of political knowledge (Cao, 2008). Based on this research, we developed another component of the third hypothesis:

***H3b.1****: The relationship between political interest and news consumption among Millennials is stronger for humorous broadcast news sources than non-humorous broadcast news sources.*

***H3b.2:*** *The relationship between political interest and news consumption among Millennials is stronger for humorous print/online news sources than non-humorous print/online news sources.*

Whether or not these young college students are getting their knowledge directly from seeking out political humor and entertainment is debatable. It has been suggested that the political comedy shows such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* contribute to a “gateway hypothesis” -- meaning such shows are gateways to traditional news programs. In this sense, the entertainment programs and traditional national news outlets are complimenting each other. One study found that late-night political comedy and talk shows act as segues to traditional news outlets. “Late-night comedy might also be an effective gateway to traditional news attentiveness because some degree of knowledge about public affairs is necessary to appreciate the shows' topical humor” (Feldman & Young, 2008 p. 403 ). This can also be contextualized with both agenda setting and priming. In some ways, the political comedy programs are priming viewers with certain political issues, and this may lead them to seek more information from traditional news outlets on the topic mentioned in the comedy program. Feldman and Young’s research has led us to another component of the second set of research questions:

***RQ2B-1:*** *Does the relationship between news consumption and the retention of knowledge differ between humorous broadcast news sources and non humorous broadcast news sources?*

***RQ2B-2*** *: Does the relationships between news consumption and the retention of knowledge differ between humorous print-online sources and non-humorous print-online sources?*

Perhaps the news does not need to be focused on Millennials and instead tailored for Millennials. One news company in particular is making headlines for its trendy dialogue geared toward Millennials. *TheSkimm* is an online news aggregator that delivers a short e-mail every weekday around 6:30 a.m. covering about half a dozen news stories in short, witty summaries. The creators of *theSkimm*, Carly Zakin and Danielle Weisberg, are two former associate NBC producers who believe *theSkimm* is redefining the morning routine for female Millennials by “delivering news and information with a distinctive voice and format”, as stated on *theSkimm*’s website. While other online news aggregators exist that also send daily e-mails, such as The Slate or the New York Times, *theSkimm* is targeting a very specific market. It has become a nationally recognized brand with over one million active readers and has gotten a substantial amount of press; even Oprah Winfrey declared it a “must-read.” But is this sassy newsletter actually educating its audience or simply providing entertainment? Bennett (2008, p. 95) believes that “As popular tastes and interests shift, the news generally follows, creating tensions with the democratic ideal of citizen-engagement oriented news. Critics argue that pandering to public tastes only fuels the spiral of declining news values.” We are interested to see how this popular online news aggregator is being received whether its audience is actually learning the information it is receiving.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Students from an undergraduate communications class (N = 176) at the University of Delaware were asked to complete the survey. In exchange, they would receive extra credit. Of these, 77 percent were female; 56% were juniors, 21% seniors, 20% sophomores, and 3% freshmen; 66% were registered to vote, political affiliation was 42% democrat, 26% independent, 23% republican, and 10% other. All but one participant was between 18-23 years of age, with the outlier being 32 years old.

**Measures**

Participants were given a measure of need for evaluation, need for cognition and need for affiliation on seven point scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” For need for cognition, we chose five items from Cacioppo & Petty (1982), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .744. For need for evaluation, we used six items from Jarvis & Petty (1996), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .637. With need for affiliation, we selected three items from two studies; Ko, Cho, & Roberts (2005) and Papacharissi & Rubin (2000), with a Cronbach’s alpha of .741.

Participants were asked to report on their political interest on two five point scales. The first of these questions, “how often do you pay attention to information about politics and public affairs” had endpoints of never and very often. The second question, “Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics and publics affairs” has endpoints of not at all interested and extremely interested. The two items had a Cronbach’s alpha of .897. In order to measure the extent of retention of public affairs information, we created ten items to test participants’ general knowledge of current events. Questions included who is the current secretary of state, which party is in control of each branch of congress, what does ISIS stand for, in which country is the United States looking to negotiate with and establish an embassy, in which state was unarmed teen Michael Brown shot and killed by an officer, which country, with which the U.S. has very close ties, recently had an election, who was the first person to announce they are running for the 2016 presidential election, who won the Men’s NCAA basketball championship, and what was the jury verdict in the Boston Marathon bombing trial.

Next, participants were asked how often they talk about politics with people in their social circles (family members, friends, professors, classmates, and co-workers) on a four point scale ranging from never to often. They were then asked how frequently they consume news from media including print newspapers, television news, political entertainment programs, online news outlets, talk radio, news aggregates (i.e. *theSkimm*), and mobile applications also on a four point scale ranging from never to often. Participants were asked to rate how likely they were to watch television programs like The Colbert Report, ABC’s 60 minutes, Fox News, The Daily Show, NBC Nightly News, CNN World Report, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, The O’Reilly Factor, and The Rachel Maddow Show on a five point scale ranging from very unlikely to very likely. Participants were then asked how likely there were to read sources including The Onion, The New York Times, BBC, the Huffington Post, *theSkimm*, the Wall Street Journal, and the Daily Current on a five point scale with endpoints of very unlikely to very likely.

Finally, participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, political affiliation, and whether or not they are currently registered to vote. They were offered extra credit points for completing the survey by their professor, which concludes the survey.

**Results**

Our first hypothesis claimed that a positive relationship between a need for cognition and political interest would exist. Based upon our data, there was a significant correlation between these two factors, *r* = .270, *p* < .001.

The first research question addressed a positive relationship between need for evaluation and political interest. The findings concluded that there is a relationship between these two variables, *r* = .298, *p* < .001.

Our second hypothesis posed that a positive relationship between a need for affiliation and political discussion would be present. Our prediction was strongly supported by the data, *r* = .298, *p* < .001.

Hypothesis 3a asserted that there would be a positive relationship between political interest and news consumption. Our findings indicated a strong correlation, *r* = .531, *p* = .002.

Hypothesis 3b predicted that the relationship between political interest and news consumption among Millennials would be stronger for (1) humorous broadcast news sources and (2) humorous print/online news sources than the analogous non-humorous news sources. The hypothesis received mixed support. In the case of broadcast, the correlation for humorous news sources, *r* = .372, *p* < .001, was higher than that for non-humorous news sources, which yielded a correlation *r* = .332, *p* < .001. In contrast, for print/online, the correlation for humorous news sources, *r* = .241, *p* = .002, was lower than that for non-humorous news sources, *r* = .440, *p* < .001.

Research Question 2a attempted to determine the nature of the relationship between news consumption and the retention of knowledge. Based on our findings, there was a positive relationship between these two components, *r* = .319, *p* < .001.

Hypothesis 4 anticipated that there would be a positive relationship between news consumption and political discussion. The data confirmed this prediction yielding a correlation of *r* = .567, *p* < .001.

Finally, Research Question 2b polled whether the relationship between news consumption and the retention of knowledge differ between humorous and non humorous broadcast and print/online news sources. For broadcast, the results of this analysis showed that there was a higher correlation between knowledge retention and news consumption for humorous sources, *r* = .370, *p* < .001, than for non-humorous sources, *r* = .036, *p* = .641. For print/online, the analogous correlations were .146 for humorous sources (*p* = .059) and .311 for non-humorous sources (*p* < .001).

**Discussion**

Through our research, we sought to study what motivated people to seek the news and how the consumption of humorous and non-humorous sources lead to different outcomes in Millennials. With an examination of need for cognition, need for evaluation, need for affiliation, and political interest we substantiated common motivations and then utilized a survey to measure the relationship between these motivations and the other factors of interest (i.e. political discussion, retention of knowledge, and selection of humorous new sources over non-humorous ones). We will now discuss the implications of our findings and reexamine hypotheses and research questions with the data in mind.

The motivations for seeking the news presented earlier in our discussion were confirmed by the data. Based upon the results of the survey, we found that an individual with a high need for cognition, someone who likes to analyze information and comprehend, it is more likely to be interested in politics. This natural curiosity acts a motivator to both seek and understand the news. Similarly, someone who has a high need for evaluation and likes to form attitudes will likely be interested in politics. A desire to make judgements on political news content is another clear motivator for one to seek and consumer new sources. The third motivation is the need for affiliation which is positively correlated with political discussion. This finding implies that those people who like to belong are socially conscious and seek validation of their personal identity through discussion about politics in order to appear knowledgeable. Lastly, our findings indicated that people who are interested in politics are more likely to consume news. The four key motivators discussed earlier were all substantiated by our survey.

What we found from our third hypothesis is, in general, political interest is positively related with news consumption. We also discovered that politically interested Millennials are more inclined to seek humorous news programs on television over non-humorous television news programs. In contrast, we noted an inverse relationship with these preferences for print and/or online news sources. Thus, the first part of our third hypothesis is supported, with the exception being the tendency for Millennials to prefer non-humorous print news sources. We believed Millennials would choose a humorous television program for a variety of reasons. For one, these programs are on television much later than the average news program, perhaps because Millennials often stay up later than most adults. For people who are politically interested, uses and gratifications also comes into play. When many college students sit down to watch television programs at night, they are often looking for a way to escape. Because they are already politically inclined, a humorous program that also tailors to their own personal interests would appeal to them more than a heavy episode of *60 Minutes* or a frivolous episode of *The Real Housewives.* Also, these types of humorous television programs are usually faster-paced and require less cognitive effort. We also attributed the result to the fact that humorous news sources are easier to share via social media.

Though these attributes contributed to partially supporting our hypothesis, the characteristics of humorous and non-humorous print sources differ. Those seeking news via print are most likely centrally processing the information, therefore, they might prefer a source without humor and just straight facts. The gateway hypothesis could also come into play here. For instance, if a viewer of *The Colbert Report* notices a certain current event or issue being covered, they could seek out the facts via print outlets later on for the straight story. Vice versa, a reader might recognize a skit on the show from an article they had read earlier in the week. The two ultimately act as supplements for one another. These results led to our initial third hypothesis being limited. An additional possible explanation for this discrepancy is perhaps news consumers do not find certain sources such as The Onion credible because it is satirical and sometimes difficult to differentiate between truth, exaggeration, and falsities. Analogously, consumers high in political interest may believe that seeking traditional, non-humorous new sources will help their overall learning because the content is perceived as more credible.

The strong positive correlation between news consumption and retention of knowledge is not entirely surprising. It was found that retention was higher amongst those who watch humorous broadcast news programs than those who watch non-humorous ones. For print news sources, retention was higher amongst those who consumed non-humorous sources than humorous ones. These findings reflect those found in the third hypothesis, assuming that those who have higher retention are also more politically inclined. If politically interested participants prefer humorous broadcast programs to non-humorous broadcast programs, the higher retention for these programs would make sense. The same can hold true for the print news consumption preference amongst politically inclined participants. When someone consumes the news, it is assumed that they are more likely to remember it based on the amount of attention and focus they give it. Politically interested people prefer these news consumption patterns, in turn both enjoying and retaining the information at hand. Similarly, the more someone pays attention to the news, the more likely they are to share with others. This may be because talking with others can lead to feeling more confident in one’s own knowledge and opinions.

**Limitations & Future Research**

One limitation of our research is that not many of the students surveyed had a high level of political interest. Only 16% of respondents said they “sometimes” or “often” read a print newspaper. On the other hand, 85% of respondents said they sometimes or often used an online news outlet, which could have included an online version of a newspaper. It is worth mentioning that only 66% reported they had registered to vote, which is also often used as a measure of political interest.

In retrospect we wish to have asked participants whether they are familiar with online humorous news sources. This data would have given us an idea about whether this sample of students could even compare a humorous news aggregator like *theSkimm* to a non-humorous source like The New York Times. Based on another question asking about frequency of news consumption using *theSkimm* as an option, we were only able to make an assumption concerning which participants were familiar with this particular source. Our best educated guess is that roughly 33% of participants were familiar with *theSkimm*, a very low number considering that this was what we hoped to measure.

Ideally, we would like to conduct a similar version of this research but would conduct a longitudinal experiment with three different conditions. The experiment would last two weeks. The first condition would involve participants reading *theSkimm*, exclusively. The second condition would involve participants getting their news exclusively from The New York Times, while the third condition would have participants seeking out no news sources. After the two week period, we would give them a post-test survey asking questions similar to those used here involving political interest and current events to understand political retention. While this description is certainly ideal, it is also extremely difficult to create these hyper-controlled conditions in an experiment. However, we feel that this would be an optimal way of judging both retention of news content.

We recommend future researchers to survey a broader scope of college students. Our sample was limited to mostly Communication majors, which could have skewed the range of politically interested students. Future researchers should include other majors of study to widen the possibilities of surveying politically-inclined Millennials and enhance data collections.

Lastly, because of the diversity of sources in the new media environment and the disjunction of consumption patterns, there is a need for improved measures of news knowledge. This conclusion is similar to Diddi and LaRose (2006), who found that “a small number of items focusing on the salient events of the day may no longer be sufficient. More contextual, qualitative measures of news knowledge should be developed” (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, p. 207).

**Conclusion**

What to say when your Millennial friend won’t stop talking about/misquoting the news? Shut *theSkimm* up.

What to say when your friend says they’ve been following the news since the 5th grade? You’re so full of *Skimm.*

What to say when your Comm major friend says they are working on news media research? Have you heard of *theSkimm*? /*Skimm*tastic

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